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Amazing Grace at Work

An interview with Jean Barbara, President of the Sword of the Spirit

By Berry Pelaez-Marfori

Sword of the Spirit (SOS) president Jean Barbara makes leading a community of 65 communities in 24 countries seem easy. By his reckoning, he spends about half of his “awake time” every month doing work for the Sword of the Spirit.

Even if he travels an average of 10 days in a month to Sword of the Spirit communities around the globe, the tax advisor who runs his own company in his native Lebanon is a firm believer in God’s grace and provision. It is grace that has allowed him to pass on a passion for mission work, which he shares with his wife, to three of his four grown children. The three have finished university and are now doing Christian service for various Sword of the Spirit communities before embarking on their professional careers. His fourth child, who is 9 years, hopes to follow in his siblings’ footsteps.

Surprisingly low key, Jean can easily lead people even if he is meeting them for the first time as he did in Vasai, India last January. Visitation work or assessing the state of a community by conducting a series of interviews with its members can be grueling. But even after five days of meetings that began at 9 a.m. and often lasted past 9 p.m., Jean managed to keep our team of eight members from three communities on track and eager to keep working.

Q: How do you explain the significance of the Sword of the Sprit to those you meet?
The Sword of the Spirit is a response to an action that the Lord started more than 40 years ago to renew the Christian people. We have responded to that call to be radical disciples who strive to live community life day-in and day-out in the way the first disciples did. The Sword of the Spirit is an international community of communities, though each community has its own local expression. Moreover, all communities are ecumenical.

Q: What is the importance of being an ecumenical community of communities?

It is important to be living it out because it is important in God's eyes. We didn't simply begin by saying: "Oh let's sit down and be ecumenical." We responded to God moving among us and putting us together as Christians from different denominations, so we approach it as an essential element of our call.



Q: What amazes you most about how God has put this community of communities together?

I am most amazed by the way our own youth in the Sword of the Spirit are responding to the same call, that we, their parents, heard. We are seeing the majority of the youth in the Sword of the Spirit respond with even more zeal than we ever had.

I was recently invited to speak at a Kairos conference, our youth program that cuts across communities in the Sword of the Spirit. There I was in Ohio (USA) in the company of 400 young men and women, who were very much on fire for the Lord and for the mission. Most of these kids grew up in community and eventually experienced for themselves the goodness of the Lord. In the summer, I will go to another Kairos conference in Quito, Ecuador, where 700 Latino youth will also gather.

Q: What kind of challenges are our communities facing today?

There are always two kinds of challenges to being radical Christians and doing mission in the modern world, external ones and internal ones. Our world today is being affected by globalization... by the very fast growth in communication technology and by anti-Christian sentiments even in the civilized world and so on. So the external challenges are real.

But there is another kind of challenge: Those that are internal. I recall that at the early stages of community life in Lebanon when we were in the midst of war and our very survival was at stake... when everything around us seemed to fall apart... the Lord spoke to us and said: You are responsible for internal challenges. I will deal with those that are external. These internal challenges involve our relationships with one another, and dealing with "the flesh," dealing with the influences of the world on us. These are internal challenges which each Christian and each community needs to face, confront and conquer by the grace of God. Handling the external challenge is up to God – and not us – to change those circumstances.

Q: What are your priorities at the moment?

First of all, God has said this is a time of grace. We are invited to go through the open door and he will provide us

with the resources we need for mission. So the first priority is about helping the Sword of the Spirit and its regions and communities to be more united in our zeal and determination to go through the open door and live out fully the mission that the Lord has asked us to do.

My second priority is youth. Again it is a priority in response to God's action among us to raise up a new generation of young men and women who want to follow the call. And it's our responsibility to equip them, to train them, to provide them with Christian opportunities, and to allow them more international exposure and integration. It is my conviction that our kids gain a great advantage when they live the Sword of the Spirit reality in a different community from their own. This is why Gap year (serving for a year after graduating from university and before starting a career) is such an important tool.

A third priority would be to promote our ecumenical identity, call, and mission.

Q: It's part of our call, we didn't just make it up. But for an ordinary individual, why ecumenism?

To be a good Catholic means to be ecumenical. This is the Church's teaching. Many popes including John Paul II and Benedict XVI can be considered ecumenical popes. One could ask in Manila, for example, how can I be ecumenical when the Ligaya community and the whole country are mostly Catholics? Well, to be ecumenical is an attitude of the heart. We could speak and act in an inclusive way or in an exclusive way – and the exclusive way would be very harmful to ecumenical efforts. When we have brothers and sisters from other Christian traditions (such as Orthodox and Protestants) coming from other parts of the world, members of Ligaya community are expected to show ecumenical courtesy.

Q: During your visit to Sword of the Spirit communities in India, I've heard you say many times that much of our lives are a result of God's grace.

That truth has been so evident and clear in my own life. You asked me earlier how I manage my time. I can be at work in my office and within the course of three or four hours I would normally receive as many as 30 telephone calls. But every time I am away for a week or more on Sword of the Spirit work, my secretary reports that hardly anyone has called for me. The surprising thing is that they don't even know my travel plans. When I do get a few calls, they can usually be handled by someone else. That can only be grace (at work in my life).

Q: Has this been consistently happening to you?

Only in the past 20 years. The more you live with this consciousness of God's grace operating in your life, the more you can move in confidence.



Jean with his family

Q: Does your family share your convictions?

That is another area of grace at work in my life. In the past year, my wife Marie-Therese has gone with me on five or six mission trips. My older son is doing his second year of missionary service in the US and next year he will do a third Gap year. My daughter is doing a Gap year of missionary service this year in Lebanon and next year in Syria. My second son has just returned from a missionary Gap year in Belfast and is serving also in the community. My youngest, who is 9, is waiting to follow in his brothers' and sister's footsteps. That's grace. Marie-Therese and I did what we could do... and only what we could. God did not ask us to do more. But even if my kids had not followed the same road, I would continue to believe in grace.

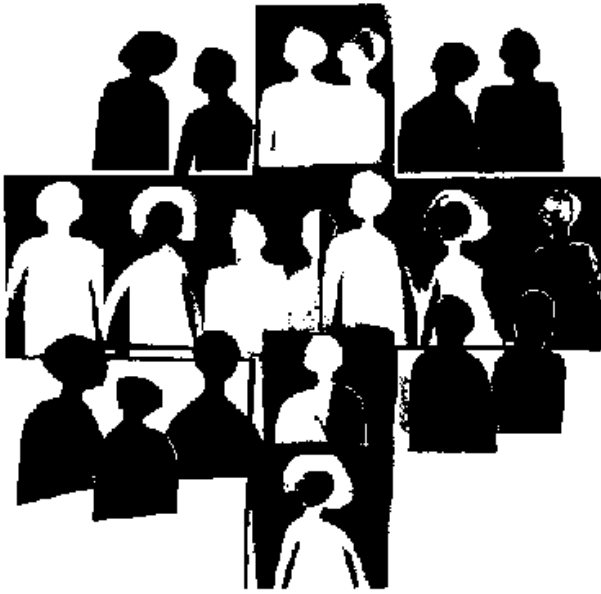
I want to make sure to give this message to parents. Believe in grace, including it's perfect timing. You who labor in the Lord will never labor in vain.

[Berry Pelaez-Marfori is the Editor-in-chief for *True North Magazine*, a publication of [Ang Ligaya ng Panginoon](#) and its partners – Christ's Youth in Action, Ang Lingkod no Panginoon, and the Institute for Pastoral Development. The article first appeared in *True North*, Volume 6, Number 1. Used with permission.]

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Community and the Nature of the Church

by Bob Tedesco

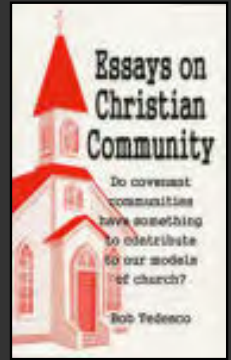
Well, I certainly feel like a lightweight defending a heavyweight title! I am not a church structure expert (ecclesiologist), nor am I an ordained pastor or priest. My professional training has been in engineering, but I do have 35 years of community-building experience which includes my membership in the People of God community in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA.

Over the years, I have received a lot of training in support of this work. That experience and training notwithstanding, I believe that every layman has some credible right to comment on the state of things based on his church membership and on the full responsibility of that membership. As study after study shows a decline of the influence of the church in people's lives and decisions, it is clear that we need more than just a small set of experts to give input into the nature and expressions of church.

I find it at least mildly encouraging that Jesus chose his apostles from among those who were least qualified to be built into the foundation of his church, which is now in its third millennium. In light of scripture, we all need to

Essays on Christian Community: Do covenant communities have something to contribute to our models of church?

written by Bob Tedesco, and published by Tabor House, Lansing, Michigan, 2010, 157 pages.



Excerpts from the Introduction

Words of the Lord to the Broader Church

In the past one hundred years, the Lord has spoken at least three major "words" to the church. These three words have been modeled and developed in movements that have involved millions of Christians, many of them new converts. The three words that I would highlight are:

1. Evangelical: the call to a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and a personal commitment to him.
2. Pentecostal: the call to be baptized in the Holy Spirit and to accept the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
3. Community: the call to committed relationships in a discipling environment that builds the Kingdom of God.

This latest word to the church, "community," has produced hundreds, perhaps thousands of communities, many of them in networks together.

All three of these words challenge the nature of the church and call it to new realities and new expressions that could further equip it to be effective in the modern world.

Sword of the Spirit

My own network, The Sword of the Spirit (SOS), is a "community of communities" that has regions all around the world: North

question; we all need to contribute; we all need to take a concern for the life of the church. Hopefully, this effort will be a useful contribution.

New Testament “Growth Plates”

A “growth plate” is a section or location in a bone from which all future growth and development takes place. If it is removed or seriously damaged when you’re young, it can freeze or inhibit further development of the size (length and thickness) of that bone. In the New Testament there are several scripture verses which are like these growth plates: sources of life for Christian life and its renewal.

One such scriptural growth plate is John 3:16:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

In such a short statement, we can learn a number of key things: 1) God loves the world; 2) He sent His Son Jesus; 3) we need to believe in Jesus to have life; 4) life is everlasting (not confined to this earth); and 5) He saves us from perishing, death, and hell. This verse is seen as seminal for Christianity.

Another such growth plate is John 3:3:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

These two scriptures could be said to be the wellspring of the evangelical movement. Indeed, they could be said to be the wellspring of Christianity.

The Great Commandments

Another New Testament growth plate is in Matthew 22; it presupposes the two already mentioned.

“But when the Pharisees heard that he (Jesus) had silenced the Sadducees, they came together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.

America, Europe, Asia, South Pacific, and Ibero-Americana (Latin America, Mexico, Portugal and Spain.).

The Sword of the Spirit has grown out of several renewal movements that preceded it. As of this writing, we have 67 communities located in 23 countries that are in various stages of commitment, and many others exploring a relationship. We have several community initiatives in formerly communist countries and the Middle East. We are ecumenical in nature and our members are from many different denominations. This ecumenical heart is one of the key works of the Lord in our midst, and it is also one of the richest fruits of our life together.

Each community has its own name and is autonomous. It is represented on the regional council by its senior coordinator. The benefits of regional and international participation are numerous, but a few should be mentioned here.

First, we seek and develop together a common way of life. We benefit from elements developed in other regions and communities.

Second, building community in a healthy way often exceeds the resources present locally, especially in smaller groups. We can get help at the regional level when we need it.

Third, each community benefits from a “visitation” every five years. A team of experienced community leaders is assembled and they visit a local community for a 3-4 day stay. They provide the local members and leadership with an outside, objective view of how things are going. They give a report that recommends areas that could be improved with suggestions for implementation. Fourth, and finally, we benefit greatly from the regional youth program where youth from all of the communities have conferences, mission trips, and summer internships together.

With all of this said, we see ourselves as a small part of what the Lord is doing today.

Again, there is much to be learned from these verses: 1) the Lord is after your heart; 2) the Lord is after your mind; 3) the Lord is after your soul; 4) He can be loved by us at all three of those levels; 5) the second is “like it”, which could mean that you could love your neighbor with your heart, mind, and/or soul; 6) these are commandments and therefore demand a response; and 7) “on these two depend all the law and the prophets.” (Not to be taken lightly; much of the Old Testament is summarized here).

Comments

I have always been struck by number seven above: “ALL the law and the prophets.” I believe Jesus is saying that all of the Old Testament is summed up in these two commandments. At the transfiguration (Matthew 17), we know that Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus. Moses represents the law and Elijah represents the prophets. Moses and Elijah together represent the Old Testament. Jesus completes this picture as being the full manifestation of the law and the prophets. It is He who gets the Father’s attention. The Father says, “This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him.” And what does Jesus say? “Love God...love your neighbor...on these two... depend all...” So Moses represents the law, Elijah the prophets, and Jesus the commandments of love.

Finally, these two are summaries of the two tables of the Ten Commandments. The first table (Commandments 1-3 in the Catholic tradition) has to do with how we love God; the second table (Commandments 7-10) has to do with how we love our brothers and sisters.

Relational at its Core

Christianity, at its core, is relational: love of God and love of neighbor. These two bring light and standards to all of the Old Testament, all of the New Testament, the Christian life, and the Christian churches. Virtually every direction and teaching of the New Testament is a reflection of our love of God and love of neighbor.

Christianity is doctrinal, institutional, ceremonial, etc., but at its core it is relational: the Lord and his bride.

The second...

Jesus said, “the second commandment is like the first” so church can’t be just worship, it can’t be just ceremony, and

Ecumenism

The Sword of the Spirit is an ecumenical network of communities. My background is Roman Catholic and much of my thinking and resources are informed from that perspective. I have tried to use sources from across the Christian traditions to serve a broader spectrum of readers. Sources are mainly scriptural, both Catholic and Protestant, but fall woefully short from the Orthodox perspective. Appendices at the back of this book offer additional resources: definitions, other tools, and examples.

Some of our local communities are all from a single church, but are supportive of the international ecumenical vision. My local community, the People of God in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, is ecumenical by intention: we have a mixture of Catholic, Protestant and Free Church members.¹

Intentions

My intentions for writing this book are: 1) to present some key lessons learned over 35 years of local community and Sword of the Spirit leadership; 2) to share scriptural references and insights about community; and 3) to identify some additional resources that others could personally research in support of the topic.² This book is not intended to be an official document, but a reflection on my own experiences and lessons learned. Most chapters are “stand alone” and can be read and used in discussion groups.

it can't be just vertical (the first commandment). It must also be horizontal (the second commandment). As modern church life becomes increasingly de-personalized or more of a "me and Jesus" experience, a progressive draining of the church's life and heart is happening. So a community that worships God is the nature of church. Not just a worshipping community, but a community that is relational by intention: a community that worships God together. One pastor declared that much of modern church experience is fellowshiping with the back of the head of the "brother" in the pew ahead of you!

["What ever happened to Agnes?"](#)

Many years ago, I read an article by a Catholic bishop, "Whatever happened to Agnes?" He wrote about a personal experience that rattled him a bit. He was fully aware of his church's new emphasis on community, and he assumed that the closest thing to that was the collection of folks who attended daily morning liturgy together: a small group who saw each other each morning at Mass. One day he noticed that one of the women was missing, and had been for several days. After a few more days, he began to ask the others. Some didn't know her name. He eventually found out that she had become ill, was hospitalized and was now recuperating. He summarized his experience by questioning our understanding, our reality of community. He was clearly disappointed. He recognized that something was wrong; something was missing. He did not offer a solution. I would say that his worshipping community was not a community; it was a set of people who worshipped together but lived separate lives and separate ways of life. Any one of them might move to the other side of the state (perhaps unnoticed) and slip into a similar group (perhaps unnoticed).

[Who gets to move Heather?](#)

Another story that gets at the relational side of Christian community is that of Heather. The People of God is an ecumenical community and we have members from several denominations. Heather was a member of one of the area's "mega-churches." For a number of personal reasons (courtship, etc.) she decided to move out of one of the community "clusters" (neighborhoods) to another part of town, closer to her church, and to leave our community. When she moved, on her last day in the People of God, it was community brothers and sisters who carried the furniture, and helped to clean and prepare the old and new apartments.

This is not meant to be a criticism or observation about a

particular local church as much as it is meant to be a call to the broader Christian church: we don't know how to love each other within the church. We leave to families the needs which are increasingly unmet at the family level. Churches usually are not organized into small groupings that promote relationships; and in some churches that do have small group structures, they tend to be "study" groups rather than "life" groups where we care for each other, grow in social relationships, and seek a common way of life together.

How did we get here?

How did we get from the early church model of Christianity to where we are today in the third millennium of Christianity? For both individuals and groups, the ongoing need for renewal, restoration, and reform could be a never-ending list of things that could and should work better. It's easy to criticize; it's easy for me to see where you could improve and for you to see where I could improve. For much of Christianity though, it is a "code blue"¹ situation. There are too many indicators of the declining influence of religion and the rising influence of secularism.

We see in this "snapshot" of the early church from Acts 2:42-47, that real community was put in place after Pentecost. They "spent time" together (v. 42) learning, praying, having fellowship, and having meals together. They spent time together "in their homes" (v. 46). They had committed fellowship (v. 44) and cared for one another's physical needs (v. 45). "Day by day" (v. 46) they met as a group. It wasn't just a Sunday worship community; their pattern was a life together, a life of community.

So, how did we get to where we are today, where so many Christians are looking for a minimal answer to the nature of the church? I believe the answers to that are very, very complex and have components at every level of humanity: spiritual, psychological, sociological, economic, etc. I'd like to propose a few for us to consider.

A few centuries ago, there was a certain natural community in place; many lived in villages, and towns were small. Making a living necessitated certain relational realities. People needed each other and looked out for each other. Families worked together in the family business or trade. Many villages and towns had a marketplace where people met and the church was central to community. When the Industrial Revolution took place, it set off a migration by which more and more people left rural regions to come into

the bigger towns and cities. This was one beginning of a pattern that was destructive to natural community at the local level and at the family level. It was less and less the case that families worked together, or that fathers worked with their sons. Today it is common for a father to go to his job, a mother to go to her job, and the children to go off to school. These were all done together or in close proximity in earlier times.

With the growth of large cities, and the divisions and isolation of family members, we are less relational or less tied to one another. Today, it is often considered a virtue if you need no one. In past times it was a given that you needed others; life was corporate.

There are many other factors that contribute at many different levels: the isolating effects of TV, video games and modern entertainment, etc. Suffice it to say that we are very, very isolated and very, very different from the New Testament church. (Another snapshot is seen in Acts 4:32-35.)

What to do?

Again there are many and varied answers to this question. I suppose you could just say, “Try something! Try anything! And do it quickly!” We in the Sword of the Spirit are not the first to notice the serious spiritual and natural differences between New Testament and modern expressions of Christianity. Dehumanizing modern life patterns have been noticed by Christians and non-Christians alike. You have to love and appreciate those who are at least trying to make a change.

For Christian renewal and reform, we should first understand that Christianity is relational. It is not emphasizing independent isolation, but inter-dependent relationships. I would say churches and large Christian groups should reorganize into small groups, after identifying and training a small set of leaders who are truly converted and dedicated to Christ. Again, the small groups are “life groups” not just study groups: life is shared; some accountability is in place; a contribution to the mission is made.

Additionally, I would say, “Get help.” Wading into these waters unprepared will cause unnecessary casualties. Remember this: different people have different capacities for failure. One strikeout can cause some young boys to

never pick up a bat again. Others will not leave the plate until they hit the ball. Wise approaches on the part of leadership can reduce the number of casualties as we grow into a Christian family.

The rest of this book will present some elements of Christian community in an attempt to make some contributions to our understanding of the nature of church and our experience of the models of church. These elements and approaches have been developed in our life together and are, hopefully, part of the solution. But first, let's begin to close this chapter remembering these verses...

- John 3:16 tells us that God loves the world and sent his son Jesus.
- John 3:3 tells us that we can see the kingdom of God if we are born again.
- Matthew 22:37-40 tells us the laws of love.

So, it is a fact that God loves us and has sent his son to redeem us. Our initial response is to be born again. The Christian life, our lived-out response, is to love God and neighbor with all that we have...and that is the quintessential nature of church.

[This article is excerpted from *Essays on Christian Community*, copyright © Bob Tedesco 2010, published by Tabor House. Used with permission.]



Bob Tedesco is past President of the North American Region of the Sword of the Spirit, a founder of the People of God community in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, and has been one of its key leaders for the past 36 years.

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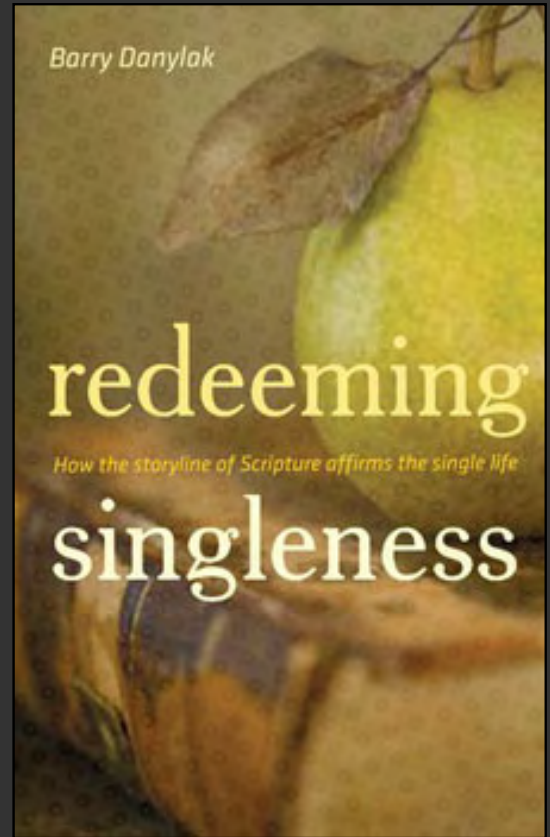
Redeeming Singleness

by Barry Danylak

The Sufficiency of Christ for the Covenant Blessings

In the Sinai covenant being married and having offspring played a fundamental role in fulfilling the blessings of the covenant. The fruitfulness of the womb was a direct manifestation of covenantal blessing. Moreover as the narrative of Ruth aptly illustrates, the messianic seed itself was to come through the physical procreation of individual Israelites. Physical procreation was the divinely ordained means by which God in his appointed time was going to ultimately bless the world through the provision of his Son.

In the new covenant the picture is different. All the blessings of the new covenant come to us through Christ. He is the sufficient source. All other material blessings of creation—whether the blessings of food, clothing, shelter, monetary provision, healthy bodies, marriage, family and even life itself—all these utterly *pale* in comparison to the blessings that God has given to us in Christ. These blessings include our full and complete reconciliation to God himself, and our glorious inheritance as members of his eternal kingdom. Nothing, and I mean *nothing*, can remotely compare with the glory and weight of these new covenant blessings. To suggest that to be a fulfilled or complete Christian in the new covenant requires anything *more* than Christ is to deny the fundamental sufficiency of Christ as the sole vehicle of



Redeeming Singleness: How the Storyline of Scripture Affirms the Single Life, written by Barry Danylak, and published by Crossway Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois, 256 pages, available September 30, 2010.

From publisher's catalog

Danylak rescues the conversation about singleness from the sphere of experiential teaching and brings it squarely into the realm of biblical theology, where it emerges as a legitimate reflection of the sufficiency of Christ's redeeming act.

Though marriage and procreation were fundamental to the propagation of God's people in Old Testament times, the New Testament affirms singleness as a calling for some Christians. *Redeeming Singleness* expounds a theology of singleness that shows how the blessings of the covenant are now directly mediated to believers through Christ.

covenantal blessing.

Some explanation is needed regarding what we *don't* mean. We are not saying that all else in creation save our relationship with Christ is to be disparaged as worthless and of no value. Nor are we suggesting that health, marriage, children, family, wealth, career, and so on are not also blessings of God. Every good gift comes to us from God alone (James 1:17). What we are saying is that if heaven forbid we should lose our health, marriage, wealth, or whatever, we are no less fully blessed in Christ as children of the new covenant and fully anticipating an imperishable inheritance awaiting us in his kingdom. And if we should never find a spouse, or find ourselves unable to produce a child, or find ourselves stricken prematurely with a terminal illness, we are no less blessed of God *in Christ*. Unlike the Sinai covenant, in the new covenant barrenness is not a sign of reproach or disobedience. Single persons whether “eunuchs” by birth, social convention, or personal choice are no less blessed as participants in the new covenant than those with the sweetest marriage and a “quiverful” of children and grandchildren.

Looked at positively as a celebration of the complete sufficiency of Christ, singleness can be a powerful witness for the gospel. Whereas in Judaism, Islam and Mormonism being married and having children are expected norms, in Christianity they are not. In choosing a life of singleness for the sake of kingdom service, one can freely demonstrate the complete sufficiency of Christ as being a fully blessed member of the new covenant, despite being without the fulfillment of a spouse and children. This is not to say that every Christian single person consciously sees his or her singleness in this way. Christian marriages can similarly be a powerful tool for proclaiming the gospel when the husband and wife respectively seek to model their marriage in the pattern of Christ and the church described in Ephesians 5. But not every Christian spouse consciously does so. Likewise, one's singleness can be a powerful testimony to the sufficiency of Christ for all things when one realizes and lives out this covenantal truth. Not every single person consciously does so, but the opportunity remains.

[This article is excerpted from *Redeeming Singleness: How the Storyline of Scripture Affirms the Single Life*, Chapter 4, copyright © Barry Danylak 2010, and published by Crossway Publishers. Used with permission.]

Redeeming Singleness offers an in-depth examination of the redemptive history from which biblical singleness emerges. Danylak illustrates the continuity of this affirmation of singleness by showing how the Old Testament creation mandate and the New Testament kingdom mandate must both be understood in light of God's plan of redemption through spiritual rebirth in Christ.

As the trend toward singleness in the church increases, the need for constructive theological reflection likewise grows. *Redeeming Singleness* meets this need, providing encouragement to those who are single or ministering to singles and challenging believers from all walks of life to reflect more deeply on the sufficiency of Christ.



Barry Danylak is a PhD candidate at the University of Cambridge. He holds graduate degrees in mathematics, Christian thought, and biblical exegesis and is the author of several reviews and articles. He previously served as a teacher and lay leader in single adult ministries for thirteen years while working as a member of the technical staff of AT&T Bell Laboratories. He lives in Alberta, Canada.



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Lessons from Martyrs: On Running and Otherwise

By James Munk

During my last year of high school, I reached the pinnacle of my athletic career: the period of my life when I was the best I was ever going to be at any sport. And in truth, I wasn't half bad. However, my sport was cross country – distance running – and even a pinnacle can feel pretty minor when not many people care about it. You see, in the pantheon of high school athletics, my sport was somewhat eclipsed by football – the American version. That sport is dominated by broad-shouldered Titans, muscle-bound and coordinated. I wasn't then – nor am I now – built that way. I was skinny, a little lanky, and just coordinated enough to run the straight lines afforded by the cross country course. Nonetheless, I would often think about what it would be like to play football: to take the field under the Friday night lights and–held in awe by the entire student body – make a major play or a bone-crunching tackle.

But in truth, I can't now (nor could I then) imagine what I would actually do. If I were given the ball, I would likely freeze. Not paralyzed by fear, but stupefied by ignorance. It wasn't my sport – not my skill set. I would not have known what to do.

Red martyrdom

Recently, the Lord has been speaking to the Sword of the Spirit (and specifically to its young people) about martyrdom. “Red” martyrdom: allowing one's blood to be spilled for the gospel.

When I think about this, my personal response is somewhat conflicted. On the one hand I find such an invitation stirs a solemn excitement: the opportunity to lay down one's life for the Lord, to give what is most precious for what is beyond price. But I find this zeal muted by another sentiment – not primarily fear; rather, incomprehension.

Christians in the past have faced torture, burnings, beatings, crucifixions, and imprisonment – suffering difficult to imagine – but I’ve grown up in a nation that values religious freedom where my beliefs are legally protected. And in my mind, martyrdom doesn’t seem like an actual possibility. As such, when I hear about Christians persecuted for their faith – in history or today in other parts of the world – I’m hard pressed to imagine a plausible scenario with me in it. It’s football, and I’m a runner.

So what then? I don’t believe lack of familiarity (or imagination) exempts one from the Lord’s call. If the Lord is calling for martyrs, he will have them. What then should I expect? Axes, lions, concentration camps and the rack? Martyrdom in a vehicle fundamentally alien to any of my experiences? Perhaps –and if so, the Lord will give grace to meet that challenge. But it is my suspicion that my generation’s contribution – our martyrdom – will be by an agent chillingly familiar. I don’t know exactly what it will be, but I feel that it will be something we’ll know, a thing we will see coming.

I believe this for two reasons. First, a conviction that it is the Lord’s plan that we find ourselves in this era of human history, not any other. He made us for something; he made our communities for something; and for a certain time. We are to build Christian community in the modernized world, a civilization unlike any that has existed before; and we are to meet its unique challenges. While our society may not have lions to which we may be fed, it is certainly not without its killers. Ours is new arena: a different sport – perhaps the one for which we have been conditioned. By living today, we may be the best ones currently suited to die.

[The quintessential act of courage](#)

The second reason is that martyrdom is the quintessential act of courage. Choosing for the Lord when it costs your life is to give a spiritual response when doing so means silencing the flesh; a flesh that knows it will perish if quieted. It is, as John Wayne said, “being scared to death, and saddling up anyway.” But this begs the question: of what is the courageous afraid – why is his flesh in rebellion? Is it the result of something beyond his comprehension? I don’t think so. Rather, it because he comprehends the predicament that he fears, and it is precisely because he knows the possible outcomes that he has need of courage. The courageous man does not hedge his bets – win or lose, he is “all in”; the ignorant man who does not know he is risking all is not to be considered brave. Courage is not simply a bold response in the face of the undefined. It is steadfastness when definite hardship promises an uncertain outcome.

If martyrdom in my generation is to be courageous, it must be of the type we can comprehend: not an element of the Christian past that is vague in our understanding, but a very real, very possible outcome for our actions. It will be an instance where courage proves its necessity, because we’ll know we are in danger. We’ll know we need it.

For these reasons, I think we’ll find martyrdom to be more familiar than we might like. In fact, forms of it may already be apparent. And here again courage is paramount: the things we know to be dangerous, we also know to avoid. We can assume that a Roman Christian walking by the Colosseum knew well what sport was done inside. Perhaps this knowledge led some believers to choose a different path.

Dare I turn this accusation on myself? Jesus told us that the world would hate us; we can be sure that it reserves special dangers for Christians – Christians in any time and any society.

Do I try to avoid these dangers? Have I looked for martyrdom in a form I won’t recognize so that I might distract myself from the one I do know? Thinking back to cross country, courage was essential to run the race – but not because I didn’t know what the race would be like – rather, because I knew exactly, and knew how I must respond.

[A sport we know how to play](#)

I believe that the Lord is inviting some of us to receive the crown of martyrdom. It is a concept difficult to grasp – hard to play out in the mind. But I take some comfort in the probability that we’ll know it when we see it. While it will not be any less difficult, ignorance will not keep us from responding – it will be a sport we know how to play.

May the Lord grant us the courage to respond to his invitation, and let us not run from the dangers we already see. Instead, let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.

Happy running.

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Air Pressure

by Michael Shaughnessy

Schools now block Internet sites to prevent youth from accessing harmful material. Here are some of the site categories they block. Alcohol, Anonymizers, Chat Rooms, Cheating, Credit Cards, Criminal Skills, Dating Services, Drugs, Fantasy Sports, Gambling, Gaming, Gruesome Content, Hacking, Hate Speech, Malicious Software, Media Downloads, Messaging (IM, SMS, MMS), Mobile Phone Utilities, Nudity, Online Auctions, P2P/ File Sharing, Personal Network Storage, Phishing, Pornography, Profanity, Shareware/ Freeware, Shopping, Sports, Spyware, Tobacco, Violence, Visual Search Engines and Weapons.

Does filtering software really work? Somewhat, and sometimes, but new technology makes it hard to keep bad stuff from seeping into the lives of teens. Can you build a wall that never leaks? Not really. The next, new, bad thing is already seeping into youth culture and will probably soon be affecting our children. Can we build the perfect defense against the world's offense? No. We can do some effective things but what is really needed is a good offense.

The Metrodome in Minneapolis is a helpful image for an effective offense strategy. This stadium has a cloth roof that is held up by positive air pressure. When you are in the stadium you don't notice that the air pressure is above normal. Then the game finishes and the exit doors open. As soon as you get in front of the doors you are blown out the doors because of the positive pressure of the stadium. Nothing seeps into the stadium.

In a similar way, youth are much more resistant to the pressure of the world when they are filled with the Spirit, with strong conviction, clear thinking, vision and purpose.

Most youth react to *defensive* parenting and *defensive* youth work. One of the main things it communicates to them is, "Be afraid." Most of them are already afraid enough – possibly not of the right things – but they are afraid!

TO THE POINT

Successful youth work equips teens with courage and faith. It fills them with a positive approach to the challenges they face. If we equip them with courage, they will be heroes. If we equip them with fear, they will be cowards.

[Michael Shaughnessy is an elder in [The Servants of the Word](#) and the Director of [Kairos in North America](#). Kairos is an international federation of outreaches to high school, university and post university aged people.]

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My Confession by Patrick of Ireland [387 - 460 AD]

Adapted and abridged for modern readers by Don Schwager

I pray that those who believe in God and who read this confession, which I, Patrick, an unlearned sinner have written in Ireland, may recognize that whatever I achieved or taught that was pleasing to God, was done so by the gift of God. This is my confession before I die.

Rebellious youth, captivity, and conversion

I am Patrick, a sinner, son of Calpurnius, a deacon of the church at Bannavem Taburniae. When I was a rebellious 16 year old, I was taken captive to Ireland along with many others. I did not truly know God at the time. God, however, took pity on my youthfulness and ignorance, and he watched over me and protected me, and consoled me as a father would his son. He opened my mind to see the futility of my unbelief and to remind me of my sins, and he helped me to turn to him with all of my heart.

God's chastisement in the land of captivity helped me to recognize him. He gave me so many graces and favors that I cannot remain silent nor cease to exalt him and confess his wonders before every nation under heaven.





For I do confess [as stated in the ancient Christian Creed] that there is no other God, but God the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ, who always existed with the Father and the Spirit. All things visible and invisible were created by him. Christ became a man and conquered death for us. When he ascended to the Father in heaven he received all power over every name and creature in heaven, on earth, and in hell, so that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is both Lord and God (Philippians 2:9-11). Christ will come again as judge of the living and the dead. He has abundantly poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit upon all who believe in Christ. The Spirit, who is the pledge of our unending life with God, makes us sons of God and co-heirs with Christ. We worship one God who is a Trinity of persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[My ignorance and youthful sins held me back](#)

I had thought of writing my testimony for some time, but I hesitated until now, because I feared the criticism of others, since my upbringing was very simple and rustic, and I was unlearned and did not know the Scriptures like many others. I acted foolishly in my youth and my life was like a stone lying in a deep mire. But why make excuses now in my old age for my youthful ignorance and sins which prevented me from choosing the path of wisdom? And who will believe me, even though I should say it again? As a young man, almost a beardless boy, I was taken captive before I knew what I should desire and what I should shun. So, even today I still feel ashamed to speak of my ignorance and my lack of eloquence.

The Lord had to humble me first through my captivity to get his attention. Then in his mercy he came and raised me up and lifted me to the very top of a wall. And from there I can only shout out in gratitude to the Lord for his great favors which he showed me without measure.

Whether you be great or small, learned or simple, listen, and consider how God summoned me, a fool and a wretch in this world, to serve him with reverence, faith, and humility. It was the love of Christ that inspired me to give my life in service to this people. So, after many years of hardships and trials during my captivity, the Lord granted me, his unworthy and humble servant, this great favor among the people here in Ireland, something which I neither hoped for nor imagined as a youth.

[The Spirit was burning within me](#)

During my captivity the Spirit was burning within me. But after I reached Ireland, my first job was to look after a flock of sheep every day. While out in the fields, I grew accustomed to pray many times a day. More and more the love of God, my respect for him, and my faith increased. My daily prayer times multiplied into the hundreds, and my prayers in the night were also numerous. Besides I used to stay out in the forests and on the mountain and I would wake up before daylight to pray in the snow, in icy coldness, in rain. But these conditions didn't stop me nor make me feel ill, because, as I now see, the Spirit was burning within me at that time.



And it was there of course that one night in my sleep I heard a voice saying to me: “You do well to fast: soon you will depart for your home country.” And again, a very short time later, there was a voice prophesying: “Behold, your ship is ready.” And it was not close by, but, as it happened, two hundred miles away, where I had never been nor

known any person. And shortly thereafter I turned about and fled from the man whom I had been serving for six years, and I came, by the power of God who directed my route to advantage (and I was afraid of nothing), until I reached that ship.

And on the same day that I arrived, the ship was setting out from the place, and I said that I had the wherewithal to sail with them; and the steersman was displeased and replied in anger, sharply: "By no means attempt to go with us." Hearing this I left them to go to the hut where I was staying, and on the way I began to pray, and before the prayer was finished I heard one of them shouting loudly after me: "Come quickly because the men are calling you." And immediately I went back to them and they started to say to me: "Come, because we are admitting you out of good faith; make friendship with us in any way you wish." (And so, on that day, out of fear of God, I resolved not to let these men influence me, but nevertheless I had hopes that they would come to faith in Jesus Christ, because they were barbarians.) And for this I continued with them, and we put to sea speedily.

My two month journey with barbarians

After three days we reached land, and for twenty-eight days journeyed through uninhabited country, and the food ran out, and hunger overtook them. One day the steersman began saying, "Why is it, Christian? You say your God is great and all-powerful, then why can you not pray for us? For we may perish of hunger. It is unlikely indeed that we shall ever see another human being." In fact, I said to them, confidently, "Be converted and believe with all your heart in the Lord who is God, because nothing is impossible for him, so that today he will send food for you on your road, until you be sated, because everywhere he abounds." With God's help this came to pass. Behold, a herd of swine appeared on the road before our eyes, and they slew many of them, and remained there for two nights, and they were full of their meat and well restored, for many of them had fainted and would otherwise have been left half dead by the wayside. And after this they gave the utmost thanks to God, and I was esteemed in their eyes, and from that day they had food in abundance. They discovered wild honey, besides, and they offered a share to me, and one of them said: "It is a sacrifice." Thanks be to God, I tasted none of it.



Satan attacked me violently

The very same night while I was sleeping Satan attacked me violently, as I will remember as long as I shall be in this body. There fell on top of me as it were, a huge rock, and I was unable to lift or move it. But for some odd reason unknown to me, I began to call upon Elijah. Meanwhile I saw the sun rising in the sky, and while I was crying out "Elijah, Elijah" with all my might, lo and behold, the brilliance of that sun fell upon me and immediately shook me free of all the weight; and I believe that I was aided by Christ my Lord, and that his Spirit then was crying out for me, and I hope that it will be so in the day of my affliction, just as it says in the Gospel: "In that hour," the Lord declares, "it is not you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking in you."

On the journey he provided us with food and fire and dry weather every day, until on the tenth day we came across some people. As I mentioned above, we had journeyed through an unpopulated country for twenty-eight days, and in fact the night that we came upon people we had no food.

And a second time, after many years, I was taken captive. On the first night I was with my captors, I heard a divine prophecy, saying to me: "You shall be with them for two months." And so it happened. On the sixtieth night the Lord delivered me from their hands.



Return to Britain

And after a few years I was again in Britain with my parents, and they welcomed me as a son, and asked me, in faith, that after the great tribulations I had endured I should not go any where else away from them. Of course, there, in a vision of the night, I saw a man whose name was Victor coming from Ireland with innumerable letters, and he gave me one of them, and I read the beginning of the letter: “The Voice of the Irish,” and as I was reading the beginning of the letter I seemed at that moment to hear the voices of those who were beside the forest of Foclut which is near the western sea, and they were crying as if with one voice: “We beg you, holy youth, that you come and walk again among us.” I was stung intensely in my heart so that I could read no more, and thus I awoke. Thanks be to God, because after

so many years the Lord heard their cry.

Another night – God knows, I do not, whether within me or beside me – I heard many words which I could not understand, except at the end of the speech it was represented thus: “He who gave his life for you, he it is who speaks within you,” and thus I awoke, joyful.

On a second occasion I saw someone praying within me, and I was, as it were, inside my own body, and I heard him above me – that is, above my inner self. He was praying powerfully with sighs. As this continued, I was astonished and pondered who it could be who was praying within me. But at the end of the prayer it was revealed to me that it was the Holy Spirit. So I awoke and remembered the Apostle's words, “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for

words” (Romans 8:26).



Monk's beehive cell on top of Skellig Michael, Ireland, 6th-7th century

A living sacrifice for Christ my Lord

Thus I give untiring thanks to God who kept me faithful in the day of my temptation, so that today I may confidently offer my life as a living sacrifice for Christ my Lord. Who am I, Lord, that you should give me so great a calling – to exalt and magnify your name in whatever place you put me, even if it be among barbarians, or some affliction? Whatever befalls me, be it good or bad, I will accept it equally, and give thanks always to God. I will put my trust in him and dare to undertake so holy and so wonderful a work, so that I might imitate those who have gone before as heralds of the Gospel to all peoples, even to the ends of the earth. This commission is being fulfilled even today, as we witness the Gospel being proclaimed in far away places such as this land.

It is tedious to describe in detail all my labors one by one. I will tell briefly how the most holy God frequently delivered me from slavery, and from the twelve trials with which my soul was threatened, from man traps as well, and from things I am not able to put into words. I would not cause offense to readers, but I have God as witness who knew all things even before they happened, that, though I was a poor ignorant waif, still he gave me abundant warnings through divine prophecy.

Whence came to me such great wisdom which was not my own, I who neither knew the number of days nor had knowledge of God? Whence came to me so great a gift of knowing and loving God, even though I should lose both my homeland and family? It was not grace of my own, but grace from God who gave me strength to preach the Gospel to the people of Ireland, and strength to suffer insult from unbelievers, reproaches from others when I went abroad, and many persecutions, including being put in chains. I am ready to spend my life and energy for the benefit of others, and should I be worthy, to even give up my life without hesitation and most gladly for my Lord. It is here among the people of Ireland that I wish to spend my life until I die, if the Lord grant me this grace.

Book of Kells
illuminated manuscript
of the four Gospels
Ireland 8th-9th century



A great harvest in Ireland

I am very much God's debtor, because he gave me such abundant grace that many people were reborn in God through me, and afterwards confirmed, and clergy were ordained for them. The masses lately come to belief, whom the Lord drew from the ends of the earth, just as he once promised through his prophets: "To you shall the nations come from the ends of the earth, and shall say, 'Our fathers have inherited nothing but lies, worthless things in which there is no profit'" (Jeremiah 16:19). Again, "I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles that you may bring salvation to the uttermost ends of the earth" (Acts 13:47). There I wish to wait for his promise which will surely be fulfilled as the Gospel states, "They shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob," as we believe the faithful will come from all the world.

For that reason one ought to fish well and diligently, just as the Lord has taught, saying, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men," and again through the prophets: "Behold, I am sending forth many fishers and hunters, says the Lord" (Jeremiah 16:16). Christ compels us to spread our nets, so that a vast multitude who are hungry and ready might be caught for God, and be baptized and taught by the clergy, just as the Lord says in the Gospel, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always to the end of time" (Matthew 28:19). Again he says, "Go forth into the world and preach the Gospel to all creation. He who believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he who does not believe shall be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16). And again, "This Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached throughout the whole world as a witness to all nations; and then the end of the world shall come" (Matthew 24:14). Likewise the Lord foretells through the prophet, "And it shall come to pass in the last days (says the Lord) that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams; yes, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit and they shall prophesy" (Joel 2:28-29). In Hosea he says: "Those who are not my people I will call my people, and those not beloved I will call my beloved, and in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'Sons of the living God'" (Romans 9:25-26; Hosea 2:23, 1:10).

How did it come to pass in Ireland that those who never had a knowledge of God, but until now always worshiped idols and impure things, have now been made sons of God and a people of the Lord, and that even sons and daughters of Irish chieftans are seen to be monks and virgins of Christ?

Among others, a blessed Irishwoman of noble birth, beautiful and full-grown, whom I had baptized, came to us and told us that she had received a prophecy from a divine messenger, who advised her to be a virgin of Christ and draw near to God. Thanks be to God, on the sixth day after this she most laudably and eagerly chose what all virgins of Christ do. Not that their fathers agree with them: no, they often suffer persecution and undeserved reproaches from their parents; and yet their number is ever increasing. How many have been reborn there so as to be of our kind, I do not know, not to mention widows and those who practice continence. But those women who live in slavery suffer the most, due to threats and harassment. But the Lord gave his grace to many of his handmaidens; for, though they are forbidden to do so, they follow him bravely.



[A life-long mission to Ireland](#)

If I should wish to separate myself from them and go to Britain, how I would love to go to my own country and my parents, and even as far as Gaul in order to visit the brethren there and see the face of the saints of my Lord! God knows how much I desired it, but I am bound by the Spirit, who gives evidence against me if I do this, telling me that I shall be guilty, and I am afraid of losing the labor which I have begun. For it was not I but Christ the Lord who commanded me to come here and stay with them for the rest of my life. And if the Lord wills, he shall shield me from every evil so that I may not sin before him.

I do believe I have chosen the right course. But I do not trust myself as long as I am in this mortal body, because the strong one, the devil, daily strives to turn me away from the faith and the purity of true religion to which I have devoted myself to the end of my life, to Christ my Lord. The flesh which is hostile to God also seeks to drag us into sinful desires that lead to spiritual death. I know that in part I did not lead a perfect life as did the other faithful; but I confess to my Lord, and do not blush in his sight, because I do not lie. From the time I came to know him in my youth, the love of God and the fear of him have grown in me, and up to now, thanks to the grace of God, I have kept the faith.

Some may laugh and scorn at this, but I shall not be silent, nor will I hide the signs and wonders which the Lord has shown me many years before they came to pass, as he knows everything even before the beginning of time.

I refused gifts and payments for my service

Many have tried to thwart my mission in Ireland. They have spoken behind my back saying, “Why does this fellow throw himself into danger among enemies who have no knowledge of God?” I don’t think it was malice on their part, but it simply did not appeal to them to expose themselves to this kind of rigorous life and danger. I was more use to it due to my rustic upbringing. But I was not quick to recognize the grace God had given me, otherwise I would have followed him earlier than I did.

You know, as God does, how I lived among you from my youth with sincerity and faith. And even among the heathens I have been honest and trustworthy. Whenever any of you gave me gifts, including gifts left at the altar from holy celibate women, I returned them if at all possible, even though this caused you some offense.

When I baptized thousands of people, I did not receive any favors or payment. In fact it cost me dearly and exposed me to many dangers for your sake. I ordained clergy without payment as well. I did all this by the grace of God, with love and joy for your salvation.

When I met with kings I gave them presents, as customary, and I financially supported those who traveled with me in my ministry. On one occasion, when my traveling band and I were robbed and put in chains, the Lord delivered us on the fourteenth day, and restored what we had lost.

I do not seek honor from others because the Lord himself is enough for me. Although I am most unworthy, the Lord has exalted me beyond measure. I prefer poverty and failure rather than a life of wealth and pleasure. After all, Christ the Lord himself was poor for our sakes. I fear nothing, not even betrayal, slavery, or murder, because of the promises of heaven. I am in the Lord’s hands, as Scripture says: “Cast your burden on the Lord and he will sustain you.”

One of the least of his servants

I commend my soul to God who is most faithful. For he is no respecter of persons, since he has chosen me for this obscure mission that I might be one of the least of his servants. I give to God what he has given to me, because I can do nothing unless he has granted it to me. I am ready to drink his chalice, just as he has offered it to others who have loved him.



May I never be separated from this people whom God has redeemed in this remote land, and may God give me perseverance to remain a faithful witness to him to the end of my days.

If I have done any good for the sake of my God whom I love, I pray that he may allow me the opportunity to shed my blood for his name’s sake, even if my body should be torn limb from limb by dogs or savage beasts, devoured by birds, or left unburied. On the last day we shall rise again in the brightness of the sun, that is, in the glory of Christ Jesus our Redeemer, as sons of the living God and co-heirs with Christ, made in his image; for we shall reign through him, with him, and for him.

Each day we see the sun rise at God's command, but its splendor will not last for ever. Those who worship the sun will perish. We who believe in Christ and worship him, the true sun, will never die. For those who do the will of Christ will be with him forever, who reigns with the Father Almighty and with the Holy Spirit both now and forever. Amen.

I testify in truthfulness and joy before God and his holy angels that I never had any reason, except the Gospel and its promises, to ever return to that nation from which I had previously escaped with difficulty.

I pray that those who believe in God and who read this confession, which I, Patrick, an unlearned sinner have written in Ireland, may recognize that whatever I achieved or taught that was pleasing to God, was done so by the gift of God. This is my confession before I die.

[Patrick was born a Briton around 387 AD in the latter days of the Roman occupation near the end of the fourth century. We do not know the location of the village he grew up in, but it likely lay near the West coast of Britain. Patrick wrote his autobiographical confession in Latin around the year 450 AD. Several early manuscript copies still exist, the oldest dating back to 807 AD by the Irish scribe called Ferdomnagh. Another shorter writing by Patrick, called the *Letter to Coroticus*, still survives today. Patrick wrote this letter to the soldiers of King Coroticus to chastize them for capturing Christians of Patrick's flock as slaves. Both writings provide us a window into the soul of this great missionary bishop who brought thousands to faith in Jesus Christ.]

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Truth: Kairos Weekend 2010

Equipping Young People to Speak the Truth of the Gospel

Report by John Robinson

Our task is to equip Kairos young people to speak the truth. The truth of Jesus Christ. The truth that sets free. The truth that brings life.

- Paul Jordan, Director for Kairos Europe and the Middle East

Question: What brings together 120 students from across the region, for a weekend of intensive community living, Spirit-inspired worship and truth-seeking? Answer: Kairos Weekend 2010 in Augsburg, Germany!

And what a weekend it was - with fresh topics such as 'Freedom,' an exploration of what it means to need God; 'Twisted Truth,' a powerful journey allowing the light of Christ to break into our conceptions about being 'Male' or 'Female'; and 'Do You Want Fries with that?' a clever yet no-nonsense workshop about how to make a decision for Jesus Christ stick.

So what is Kairos? We are a growing network of student outreaches all across Europe, the Middle East and beyond, who have caught a vision for radical Christ-centered, missional community and who are making it become a reality. We gathered as representatives of this bigger thing. We came to hear stories from across the globe, to laugh and cry together as we shared our successes and failures, to be empowered and re-envisioned for what God is doing among us.

This weekend was an inspiring thing. Here was an army of young people being joined together by a common call and mission from God. That mission? To build the kingdom of heaven on earth; and to let its message of light pervade even the darkest corners of despair that we find around us. We returned to our local outreaches ready to see this vision spread further as it transforms lives. These are people who are giving up the game of compromise, people to whom God is saying: “I do not want a ‘generous donation,’ I want all of you!”

In return we have received relationships that are rich, a joy that is deep, and a promise that gives us hope - and God’s work among us has only just begun. Read on to find out more...

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[John Robinson is a staff member of [Koinonia](#), the Kairos student outreach in London.]

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Caught in Conversation

An interview by John Robinson

On the way to Germany, John Robinson (JR) interviews Martin Edobar (ME) and John Nguyen (JN), two Kairos Weekend first-timers from Koinonia, the Kairos student outreach in London, England. Here is an excerpt.

JR: So guys, we're on a plane somewhere over the North Sea, on our way to Kairos Weekend 2010 (KW10) in Germany. What are your expectations for the trip?

ME: Meeting loads of cool new people, enjoying the vibe and seeing the bigger global picture.

JN: Being able to experience a larger community than Koinonia itself; there are lots of different "Koinonias" beyond London!

JR: Have you heard anything about the spiritual theme for the Weekend?

JN: The theme is Truth. I think it's quite appropriate for me because I've just started this faith journey, so I'm still getting rid of the old me and the 'untruth' in me.

JR: What does Kairos mean to you?

JN: I've heard it's a Greek word meaning 'the opportune moment.' It's quite fitting, actually, because this kind of weekend does not happen all the time. When it does come around you should seize the opportunity and experience it as best you can.

JR: How did you guys end up in Koinonia?

JN: A friend asked me to sign up as a member, and I said, “Yeah, fine.” Then she asked me to actually go to a Koinonia meeting, and I said “Ummm, not so sure...” I wasn’t really a Christian. I had never been to anything like that before, but I decided to give it a shot. I really enjoyed it, but I felt quite different to everyone else. Then we had an overnight retreat in Kent. That helped confirm why I’m here and what I am doing with Koinonia – and that’s why I am going to the Kairos Weekend.

ME: For me, it was during Fresher’s Fair at university. My friend Sammy and I walked past the Koinonia student centre and thought we smelled food, so we went inside to see what was going on. I was just shocked that somehow a society in ULU (University of London) had a permanent room; that is very uncommon. Someone made me a toasty and gave me a leaflet about a dance event that evening. Sammy and I took the leaflet thinking, “Nah, we’re not going.”

We were going to go to a party in Soho, but later we thought, “Let’s just go to this dance party instead ... it might be interesting.” We went along; everyone was really friendly and cool. At that point we didn’t know what it was really all about; we just thought it was a weird kind of society. So we kept going to the meetings and eventually decided to do the Alpha course - and we enjoyed it. We were invited on a weekend away. We were a bit hesitant - a weekend in a barn with people you don’t really know? It turned out to be a great experience, and made us want to stay!

JR: If there was one thing you could take away from the Kairos Weekend, what would it be?

ME: To understand what community is all about, and the concept of truth.

JN: To have a moment with God where he comes deeper into my life. I’ve already been praying about it, and I think the Kairos Weekend will be a great opportunity for that to happen.

Next page > [The Freedom of Truth](#) by Rachel Moran

[John Robinson is a staff member of [Koinonia](#), the Kairos student outreach in London.]

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The Freedom of Truth

by Rachel Moran

I went on the Kairos Weekend not knowing what to expect, but very excited. The topic for the weekend was ‘Truth’, which intrigued me. I wondered how an entire weekend could be based on something so straightforward – I thought ‘truth’ was pretty plain and simple.

After thirteen hours of travel, finally we arrived in Augsburg, Germany. The opening talk of the weekend was given by Sam Geleyn, simply titled ‘Truth!?’ It challenged and inspired me. It gave me a real desire to fully enter into the weekend and to explore what God might have for me.

The following day the women had an excellent session with Monika and Anna Stock [mother and daughter] about the lies that we, as women, have often believed. We took the opportunity to actively reject these lies and made decisions to no longer believe them. The Lord really called me this weekend to reject a particular lie that I have believed for many years: that I am stupid, unintelligent, and unable.

I know this lie has been holding me back in many ways, particularly from delving into a deeper relationship with the Lord. I know the Lord values me and wants more for me; but I’ll only be able to get there and live in the Truth if I begin by rejecting this lie.

For all of us, Truth is an area that the Lord wants us to deal with. By facing and rejecting the lies that have gotten a hold over us we can be healed from the pain and hurt they have caused us. I have been inspired this Weekend by renewed relationships which have given me great hope. I leave the Kairos Weekend this year with a strong desire to serve the Lord and get to know him better!



The Challenge to Change

by Raphael Miller

Sometimes the Truth is hard to handle. We can turn away from the Truth because often it presents a challenge to us: the challenge to change. Through a series of talks and small group discussions over the weekend, I realised that change isn't always easy. Most of what was discussed were things I already "knew," but had turned away from without realising. By hearing the experiences of others, I began to realise that all of us need to be guided by Truth, because God is Truth. My faith can be renewed by Truth.

One of the speakers [Andy Pettman] quoted the words of Anselm of Canterbury, "Credo ut intelligam": *I believe so that I may understand*. Faith and Truth cannot be without one another. [Andy] went on to explain how God leaves a gap in all of us, so that we may fill it with his Truth – which comes from him alone. Through this constant sharing of experiences in small groups, we realised we all struggle with the same lies and falsehoods, but in this we can acknowledge we have the same gap.

Sometimes, we have to make a sacrifice if we want God's Truth to fill that gap. If we want to become real disciples we eventually have to give into the Truth that compels us to change, even if it is painful at first. The Kairos Weekend was one of the places where this became real. Dozens of us left the Weekend with an amazing drive to change for the sake of Christ and the knowledge and love of Truth.

Truth is one of our greatest spiritual weapons. Without it we can do nothing with the evil and temptation we face as young people. On the Kairos Weekend, we came together from many countries and denominations, yet in all of our individual journeys there is still one truth. As we are united through one Spirit, we are united by one truth.



Conversion, Covenant, and Immortal Diamonds!

by Tom Mangan

The Gospel is *never* negotiable. It cannot be adjusted to fit special needs. It is what it is. It applies today in the same way it applied 2000 years ago. It will apply in the same way years from now. It is an absolute. Everyone, everywhere, and in every age will face the same question: where do you stand with the Christ?

When Jesus proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God, he said: “Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). I believe that if we want to be faithful disciples of Christ, then we need to embrace both conversion and covenant on an ongoing basis. We need the balance of both. Conversion is the growth element and covenant is the context in which growth occurs.

Now conversion to the Good News demands a continuous response. In other words, grow or die! If we are to remain faithful to this eternal Gospel we must be dedicated to growth. I have come to understand that the process of conversion is in the present *continuous* tense. Even the Christ grew as he lived on the earth. Look at the end of chapters 1 and 2 of Luke: “And the child grew and became strong in spirit...” “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man.”

New Testament examples:

Let me give you a few examples from the New Testament. First, let’s look at **Mary**, the mother of Jesus. She moves from *discipler* of Jesus to *disciple* of Jesus. Look at the absolute beauty of Mary’s inspired song recorded in Luke 1:46-55, which is rich in truth, tradition and humility. It’s a true canticle – a song of praise, recounting the deeds of God, recorded in Scripture. It’s a great teaching that I’m sure, as a mother, she passed on to her son. It’s filled with great ideals. (Long before she conceived Jesus, the Word of God who became flesh in her womb, she allowed the

Word to take root in her heart.) But, as a disciple she “kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Luke 2:19). Later, in the Gospels we see Mary change with her life’s experiences: (1) when Jesus was “lost” in the Temple, (2) at the wedding feast of Cana when the wine ran out and (3) at the Cross where she is silent.

Peter, the chief Apostle, is another example. He moves from impetuosity to a humble submission to the will of the Lord. In Matthew 16:22-23, he rebukes Jesus. He attempts to speak for the Lord; he betrays Jesus. Then, at the turning point in his career, Peter falls to his knees and is completely overcome (Luke 5:8)!

Yes, he turns from *discipler* to *disciple*. At the end of John we see prophetically a far different person than the outspoken fisherman of the earlier chapters. We see a man who will ultimately offer up his life for the Kingdom. The path of coming to faith is different from that of coming to the mere knowledge of God. Just look at the maturity of Peter as expressed in 1 Peter 1:3-9. If maturity equals the producing of spiritual fruit, then Peter had a bushel full!

Paul – the ultimate Christian disciple maker in the New Testament – had taken part in the martyrdom of Stephen. He consented to Stephen’s death and breathed threats and murder against the disciples of Jesus. He acquired legal documents for the imprisonment of the followers of Christ.

Later, in his aggressiveness as a disciple, he would confront Peter to his face over the issue of Judaizing Christians. But, toward the end of his life we see a humble disciple who, from prison, encourages the Christian communities with godly profundity and wisdom – a sure sign of a mature man of God. You can see a great example of this in his letters to the Colossians and to the Philippians.

1 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory... 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

– Colossians 3:1-4, 16-17

The people of Israel in the Old Testament may have been Jews, but they weren’t necessarily religious. In other words, they may have bought into “the way of life,” but not the Messiah or his prophets. It is possible for us to do the opposite. That is, to accept Christ and reject “the way of life” he has so generously given us. Growth occurs in context. If tomatoes need a hothouse, we, too, need a field in which to flower. We need covenant; we need community!

God is a covenant maker

If you look through the Bible you can see many instances in which God made a covenant with people: (1) Adam & Eve, (2) Noah, (3) Abraham, (4) Israel, (5) the Levites, (6) Phineas, (7) David and (8) of course, there is the New Covenant that he made with all of us. Christ is the mediator of that covenant and the Holy Spirit is the administrator of it. The sheer number of times in which God made covenant should give us a hint of how God works with a people. A covenant helps us to keep our promises, to manifest our love, to agree on certain things, to remember, to pass important things on to the next generation, to walk in God’s abundant blessings, to remain rightly related to the Lord, to instill in each of us a healthy godly fear. A covenant can also help us to understand the everlasting nature of God’s covenant, to be more God-like, to love with a deeper commitment, to obtain the mercy of God, to learn how to worship, to tug God’s heart, to set apart certain things for the Lord, to be free and to be better brothers and sisters to one another.

We are a covenant people and we keep covenant in all sorts of ways: not neglecting to meet together, keeping holy the Lord's Day, worshiping, tithing, praying, serving, doing works of mercy, etc. We meet in covenant gatherings to do the Lord's business together. This is our time. We need each other more than we could ever imagine. The glaring example of righteous lives is in our midst. We need the challenge to outdo one another in zeal. If you shoot low, I will only shoot lower, but if you reach for the stars, then I'll reach for them with you as well.

Small groups provide a pastoring, caring environment to spur or aid growth. Where else can we find acceptance, worth and compassion, but with the brothers and sisters? What if, like Solomon, you prayed for wisdom and knowledge and God sent you to your men's or women's group to receive it?

What if we walked into our small groups looked around and said this: "These folks here are a means of grace for me today!" Growth isn't optional. It is absolutely imperative for us if we are to reach our goal of being changed into the image and likeness of God (2 Corinthians 3:18). Let's face it, sanctification (Romans 6:19), transformation (Romans 12:2) and growth (1 Peter 2:2) should be *present continuous* actions for us. We are called to *offer* our bodies in slavery to righteousness to be transformed by the *renewing* of our minds. If we want to *mature* in our salvation, then we need the on-going help and support of one another. The Scriptures give ample reasons for this:

9 Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. 10 For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up. 12 And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.

- Ecclesiastes 4:9-10,12

A launch pad to maturity

The Christian community should be a launch pad to maturity. A launch pad is a platform with a supporting structure from which a rocket can take off and head for its destination. As a people, we find this supporting structure in our brothers and sisters who will pick us up when we're down and help us go further than we could on our own (Sirach 37:12). We need to encourage, counsel, and pray for one another. Spiritual progress can only happen with the aid of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Our goal and destiny is nothing less than immortality, union, and glory with God.

Gerard Manly Hopkins (1844-1899) penned in verse this great mystery of our faith when our mortal nature will be changed in a instant at the last trumpet sound when the Lord Jesus returns in glory:

"In a flash, at a trumpet crash,
I am all at once what Christ is,
Since he was what I am, and
This jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch,
 matchwood, immortal diamond,
Is immortal diamond."

[from the poem, [That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire](#)]



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My Best Summer Ever

Experiencing God with and through housemates

By Ceri Jane Talan

Every summer, Christ's Youth in Action (CYA) organizes households or opportunities for teenage and university-age students to live together for a set period while serving others. Services may include teaching underprivileged children, facilitating trainings for other young people or simply doing chores like cooking and cleaning for housemates. But whatever tasks one draws, housemates also experience growth in their prayer life as well as relationships with others.

What makes a good summer? On my list would be: a good trek to the mountains, caves, and falls; trips to churches and fairs; tasting mouthwatering delicacies; finding a new set of friends; touring magical places; participating in productive outreaches; heartwarming smiles and hugs from kids; fellowship; and a lot of first times.

Last year, I enjoyed all these in a Christ's Youth in Action (CYA) Summer Training Household in Iigan, Isabela. On top of all these, I experienced God's great love through people and prayer.

I had been to many CYA activities, but the summer household is where I truly got to know my sisters more. I spent quality time with them as we prayed, studied Scriptures and did household chores together. I saw ourselves outdoing one another in service and sharing each other's joys.

We also gave tutorials and value formation programs to kids who hugged and kissed us when we bid them farewell. Joy overwhelmed us when they gave us small tokens bought from their meager allowance as a means of thanking us, their teachers.

Best of all, I got to spend more silent moments with the Lord during the summer household. It was there that I got to really escape the busy world and talk to Him -about my fears and weaknesses and His offer of strength, about my mistakes and His forgiveness, about my shortcomings and His power, about my mediocrity and His perfection, about

my need for Him and His love for me.

Last year, I had the most heartwarming and productive summers ever. I hope I get to experience it once again.

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Discovering the Treasures in Jesus' Parables

by Jeanne Kun

As we read the stories in the gospels, we often form a mental picture of Jesus as he went about his mission. Perhaps we imagine him sitting in a boat, speaking to the crowds that have gathered on the shore to listen to him. Or we might visualize him standing on a hillside, surrounded by huge numbers of people who are jostling one another in their eagerness to secure a spot near this extraordinary rabbi from Galilee. These scenes are easy for us to envision because we're so familiar with the gospel accounts of Jesus and his ministry.

But have you ever wondered what Jesus actually sounded like when he spoke? We don't know whether his voice was deep and resonant or had a mellow timbre, yet surely the tones in which he spoke reinforced the meaning of his words. We'd hardly imagine Jesus rebuking demons in a soft-spoken manner. And when he forgave sinners and consoled the sick, the warm quality of his voice must have conveyed tenderness and compassion.

Jesus' words are still loud and clear today, although his voice is no longer audible. And among the words of Jesus that resonate in our minds and hearts most strongly are those contained in the striking parables he told.

“Why Do You Speak in Parables?”

Jesus was a storyteller par excellence. Stories like those of the good Samaritan, the Pharisee and the tax collector, and the prodigal son have become ingrained in our culture. Lost sheep and pearls of great price are catalogued in our mental file of symbolic images. For generations of Christians and non-Christians alike, the parables Jesus told have served as metaphors for our collective conscience. Speaking in parables was a characteristic feature of Jesus' teaching, both to his own disciples and to those who flocked to hear him. He presented the truths of his kingdom through parables – “earthly stories with heavenly meanings,” as they have been popularly called – not to entertain his listeners but to instruct them.

“Parable” is derived from para and bolé, two Greek words that literally mean “something thrown or placed alongside something else.” The Hebrew counterpart to “parable” is mashal, a term that broadly encompasses such figures and forms of speech as similes, analogies, metaphors, proverbs, riddles, and stories. Examples range from one-line sayings – “You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14) – to long illustrative stories like the parable of the sower (Luke 8:4-15) and dramatic narratives like the one about the unrighteous steward (Luke 16:1-13).

Whatever their length, parables make comparisons to show how similar or different things are. In much the same way that metaphors work, parables describe concepts that are unfamiliar or intangible in terms of concepts that are familiar, vivid, and concrete. The effect is that we transfer characteristics and opinions of objects, events, or situations that we understand to those that are abstract or less familiar to us. In the parables, Jesus often helped his listeners understand what God expected of them through narratives of events in this world: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a marriage feast . . .” (Matthew 22:2). In telling these stories, Jesus drew upon ordinary objects and images, such as seed and salt, lamps and leaven, to communicate spiritual principles. As he told his followers, “From the fig tree learn its lesson” (Mark 13:28). He spoke the language of the people and used parables to make his message accessible to everyone.

What makes the parables different from other types of metaphor is that they don’t merely compare two individual objects or events. Rather, the situations in the stories Jesus told provide insight into moral principles with broad applications. So, while the elements of the individual parables were drawn from particular situations that could have occurred in that culture and at that point in history, their subjects are universal themes that transcend cultures and time. The spiritual truths they contain about life, death, God, and human relationships resonate with all of human existence. The fact that the parables still speak to us today is evidence of their enduring nature.

Moreover, Jesus frequently underscored spiritual truths of the parables through the use of hyperbole and by contrasting opposite qualities such as virtue and vice, wisdom and foolishness, generosity and meanness of spirit. The parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) is an animated portrayal of just such a contrast. And there is no clearer instance of exaggeration than the parable of the unforgiving servant, in which a slave who was forgiven for a debt of 150,000 years’ wages refused to forgive a debt against him for only a hundred days’ wages (Matthew 18:23-35).

That is not to say that the meaning of all of the parables was immediately apparent. Even the apostles frequently had to ask Jesus to explain them. Like the best novels and poems written by human authors, these divine stories have multiple layers of meaning and interpretation. For Jesus’ first-century audience as for us today, they are capable of teaching moral truths, sparking new insights, and deepening our understanding of God and our faith.

“Explain to Us the Parable”

Why was speaking in parables one of Jesus’ favorite teaching methods? Telling a story is a powerful means of capturing people’s attention. A gifted storyteller has the ability to gain listeners’ interest, involve them in the story’s drama, and hold them in suspense regarding its outcome. In addition, the pictorial language of parables and stories is easier to remember than abstract thoughts. Thus, Jesus’ vivid parables function to fix chosen concepts and values firmly in our memory and imagination.

Jesus’ parables are not simply good or engaging stories – they are stories that are part of God’s revelation to us. The love of God, mercy and forgiveness, and the values of the kingdom are among the great themes of Jesus’ teaching that he addressed by means of parables. In telling parables, Jesus revealed the heart of God and made his Father’s will known to us.

Jesus didn't use his parables to enter into debate or argument with his listeners. But to make a point or explain the principles of God's kingdom, he often posed challenging questions before beginning his parables. "Which one of you . . . ?" (Luke 15:4); "What do you think?" (Matthew 21:28). Sometimes the question came at the end of the story: "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" (Luke 10:36).

By questioning his hearers, Jesus drew them into the story and challenged them to figure out the message of the parable themselves – often by examining their own hearts and lives and reconsidering their conventional viewpoints or preconceived ideas. Above all, his parables were meant to evoke a personal response that would have consequences in each hearer's life: They were to lead his audience to conversion, to a change in their attitude or behavior toward God and one another. "Words are not enough; deeds are required. The parables are like mirrors for man: will he be hard soil or good earth for the word?" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 546). Our heavenly Father speaks to us through Jesus' stories and calls us, through the promptings of the Holy Spirit, to a reorientation and transformation of our lives. We are not to remain passive hearers.

Frequently Jesus' parables are provoking and paradoxical. Quite often their conclusions are surprising. Sometimes the choice of characters and their roles confound expectations. The opening of the parable arouses interest; as the story unfolds, the problem or issue emerges and suspense mounts. The climax and resolution may not only be unexpected but even disturbing, unsettling, or irritating – forcing the listeners to confront their own reactions. In some instances, Jesus even leaves the parable open ended, compelling his hearers to finish the story for themselves. For example, we might wonder whether the elder son ever had a change of heart, set aside his resentment, and joined in the celebration for his prodigal brother.

The Written Record

We should remember that Jesus' parables were delivered "on the spot," directed to his listeners in the various circumstances in which he encountered them. He seized "teachable moments" to address the crowds that followed him. Originally spontaneous oral teachings, the parables of Jesus were first passed on among the earliest Christians by word of mouth. Then the gospel Evangelists, relying on their own memories and the testimony and recollections of first-hand witnesses, wrote down the sayings and teachings of Jesus under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

In recounting Jesus' parables, the Evangelists would have probably used the original settings in which they were told, if those were known. Or, they may have provided a framework suited to the content and sense of Jesus' teachings as well as to the thrust and structure of the gospel as a whole. The pastoral concerns of the early church also affected how the parables were recorded and interpreted in the gospels. For example, the lost sheep in the parable in the Gospel of Luke (15:4-7) is descriptive of sinners Jesus welcomed, whereas in Matthew 18:12-14, the "sheep gone astray" is identified with fallen-away Christians in need of special care by the church community.

Such applications of Jesus' parables should not be seen as misrepresentations or distortions of his original meaning. Rather, they indicate how the Evangelists and the early church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, recognized the living quality of Jesus' words and their relevance to every generation that hears them.

"Let Anyone with Ears Listen!"

Understanding and interpreting Jesus' parables often demands some real effort, but delving deep enough to uncover their riches and treasures has its own rewards. Most of the parables are multilayered and cannot be reduced to a single lesson or message. Such oversimplification would strip the stories of their mystery and severely limit their impact. On the other hand, Jesus' parables are not allegories in which every detail in the story has a particular hidden significance and needs to be analyzed and broken like a secret code. Though many of the parables do contain allegorical features and images that serve as symbols of divine realities, attempting a point-by-point analytical

interpretation of each detail has often led to some strange stretching of the imagination.

If grasping the parables demands effort, allowing them to transform us requires not only hard work but open, willing hearts. We can understand Jesus' stories and integrate their truths into our lives only when we desire to be close to God – when we welcome his words with faith, yearn to do his will, and surrender ourselves to him in love. Perhaps that's why Jesus told his disciples that the “secrets of the kingdom of heaven” are not given to all (Matthew 13:11), and so often declared, “Let anyone with ears listen!” (Matthew 13:9, 43; Luke 8:8).

Another way to “hear” Jesus' parables is to read them aloud. Words come alive – and call forth life – when we give them voice. In earlier centuries, people normally read aloud; reading silently is actually a fairly modern development. Although we often hear Jesus' parables proclaimed in the Liturgy of the Word, it may be helpful to try reading them aloud by yourself or within your faith-sharing group. By reading them with expression, you may gain new insights. Such a practice can restore to the written word its original spoken quality and help you and your group imagine that you are there, at the scene, listening to Jesus speak.

As you progress through this guide, may you uncover all the treasures the Lord has for you, especially the “pearl of great price” – Jesus himself. As you listen to his words, may your love for him increase so that your heart's desire is to give all that you have to “purchase” that precious pearl.



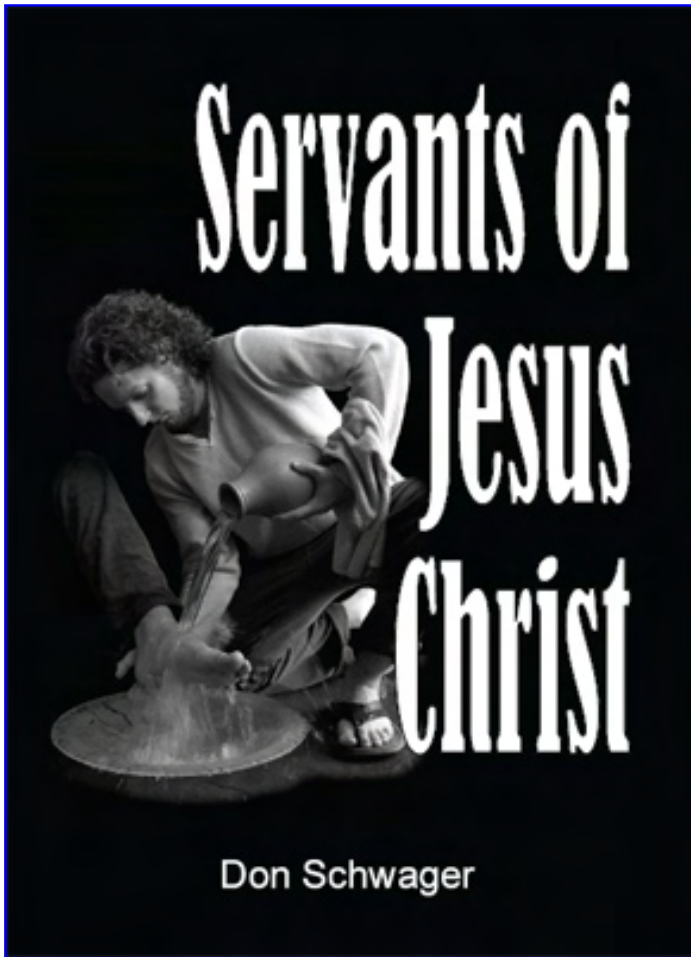
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New Book from Tabor House

Servants of Jesus Christ
What can the New Testament teach us about the transforming power of Christ's love and the way of servanthood?

written by Don Schwager,
published by [Tabor House](#),
Lansing, Michigan, 2010,
100 pages

From the Preface

At the height of the Renaissance, Niccolò Machiavelli wrote *The Prince*, a book regarded by many as the political masterpiece for achieving power, wealth, and success. It remains a bestseller today. Machiavelli wrote that people are motivated by fear and envy, and desire for wealth and power. His worldly perspective contrasts sharply with the gospel paradox: *many that are first will be last, and the last first* (Matthew 19:30), and *blessed are the poor in spirit...the meek...those who mourn...and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied* (Matthew 5:3-6). Jesus' message turns the world's values of power and fulfillment upside down.

Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave – just as the Son of man did not come to be served but to serve (Matthew 20:26-28).

The gospel shows us the way to true freedom and success. I doubt that the topic of Christian servanthood will ever make the world's bestseller list. But if we want to achieve true happiness and fulfillment, Christ offers us the surest way.

My task in writing this book is to train and equip people, especially members of the Sword of the Spirit, for Christian service. The Scriptures and the testimony of the early church fathers bear witness to the

transforming power of Christ's love and his way of servanthood. The heart of a servant is the heart of Christ himself who said, *I came not to be served but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for the many* (Matthew 20:28). There is great joy, freedom, and strength of character for those who live this way of love and servanthood. Paul the Apostle tells us that *God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us* (Romans 5:5). It is the transforming power of God's love that can change not only individuals, but families and communities, old people and young, into servants of Jesus Christ who seek to live and serve together as a community of disciples on mission.

This book is not an exhaustive treatment of Christian servanthood, but it does seek to give an overview of what the New Testament says about servanthood and about the disciple's relationship to Jesus Christ.

The book aims to show how we can orient our lives and everything we do to the Lord Jesus Christ. Christian servanthood is first and foremost a way of loving and serving others as the Lord Jesus has loved and served us, laying down his life for us. It seeks to expose how the world and Satan can mislead us into serving ourselves for personal gain rather than serving the Lord for his glory. It explains how one can grow in the servant-like qualities of the Lord Jesus. Whether you are a mother or father, married or single, a student or a worker, you have the same call – to be a disciple and servant of the Lord Jesus Christ!

[Don Schwager is a member of [The Servants of the Word](#) and the author of the [Daily Scripture Reading and Meditation](#) website.]

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The Heroes of Middle-Earth

J. R. R. Tolkien & the Marks of Christian Heroism

by Leon J. Podles

J. R. R. Tolkien's hold on the imagination has been surpassed by few writers in the twentieth century. His books have sold tens of millions of copies, and the website for *The Lord of the Rings* has had 30 million hits per month (at one point it was getting one million hits per hour). British readers have voted *The Lord of the Rings* as the best book of the twentieth century and, according to members of the Folio Society, the best English book ever.

I discovered Tolkien when I was sixteen. I was also discovering Chestertonian Catholicism, the nineteenth-century artist, designer, and writer William Morris, and Icelandic sagas (which Morris translated), and I found in Tolkien a kindred soul. But Tolkien's enormous popularity is based upon an appeal to concerns broader than mine at that age: concerns about what it is to be a man and hero, about what love is between mortal creatures, about the meaning of life lived under the shadow of inevitable death.

Tolkien probes these concerns because his own life, like the twentieth century itself, was lived under the shadow of war and mass death. He knows that salvation comes by grace alone, through a heroism very much like that of Christ.

Tolkien's imagination is both Christian and masculine. The heroic manhood that he portrays in *The Lord of the Rings* shares key aspects with Christ's heroic mission: bravery, pity, mercy, love, self-sacrifice, and suffering. All of

these can be found in Tolkien's heroic tale, *The Lord of the Rings*, and are key to understanding both its broad appeal and its richness as a work of the Christian imagination.

Heroic Manhood

The Lord of the Rings is in the tradition of heroic fantasies like *The Odyssey*. Every boy's life is a quest to become a man. Boys are raised on stories of boys who leave home, face challenges and danger and death, and return transformed into men. The boy must distance himself from the person to whom he is closest and whom he loves most – his mother – because she cannot provide him the model of what he is supposed to become.

He must leave the world of childhood, in which he is cared for and protected, so that he can enter the adult male world, in which he learns to care for and protect others. The quest theme is universal because all cultures tell their boys stories about the quest to become a man. The hero, the one who has achieved this quest and become a man, is the central literary figure of each culture. Even though most of the males Tolkien writes about are Hobbits, they have the same problems of growing up that human males have.

Tolkien achieved manhood during the Great War. He lost close friends to death. He saw the reality of battle and the special horror of industrialized mass death, which poisoned the earth and left tens of thousands of bodies rotting on the battlefield.

His intellectual interests were the masculine Anglo-Saxon and Icelandic literatures. The style of these literatures is laconic, and their subject matter is battle and struggle in the face of inevitable death.

In contrast to the effeminate, homosexual atmosphere of the English university (think of Sebastian in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*), he and C. S. Lewis and other Inklings drank beer, wore tweeds, and took strenuous country walks, so that even their civilian life was markedly masculine.

Becoming a man and a hero (who exemplifies masculinity) is not simple; the task is fraught not only with dangers but also with paradoxes. Masculine strength can be used for good and evil; the willingness to face death can lead to a love of death; nihilism is the pit awaiting the man who is most willing to accept the challenges of masculinity. The hero is both divine and demonic. Achilles is a blazing, devouring fire; Beowulf is like his adversary, Grendel. Like all realities of Middle-earth, masculinity and heroism are self-destructive. Middle-earth cannot save itself.

War & Male Friendship

Traditional military heroes are present in *The Lord of the Rings*. Aragorn is the king in disguise, who eventually leads his army into battle, but only as a diversionary tactic. However great heroism is, however worthy of praise the warrior who seeks to protect his people may be, military heroism is at best inadequate and at worst dangerous to the people it seeks to protect. The riders of Rohan ride upon their foes with the cry of "Death!" But they cannot defeat the Ringwraiths, nor can the host led by Aragorn defeat Sauron. Boromir seeks the Ring to protect his people, but it enchants him and converts him into a monster. He redeems himself by giving his life trying to protect the other Hobbits, the supreme act of true friendship.

The closest friendships in *The Lord of the Rings* are between males (of different species: Men, Hobbits, Dwarves, and Elves). Male friendship is the emotional center of the book. Bilbo remains a bachelor and makes his nephew Frodo his heir. In Germanic literature, the uncle-nephew relationship is closer than the father-son relationship. The fellowship has various male relationships: the master-servant relationship of Frodo and Sam, the teenagers' camaraderie of Pippin and Merry, the friendship of opposites of Legolas and Gimli, the leadership of Aragorn, the failed leadership of Boromir.

Sam, who himself attains heroic stature by the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, is modeled after the English soldiers and batmen (officers' servants) whom Tolkien encountered in the Great War. The comradeship of soldiers in suffering is intense and physical. In war, men feel a closeness to their comrades, who are willing to die for one another and with whom their blood may mingle, a love that surpasses the love of women. The scene in which Sam rescues Frodo from tortures by Orcs shows the intensity and closeness of this relationship. Sam discovers Frodo, who has been captured by the Orcs.

[Frodo] was naked, lying as if in a swoon on a heap of filthy rags. . . .

“Frodo! Mr. Frodo, my dear!” cried Sam, tears almost blinding him. “It’s Sam, I’ve come!” He half lifted his master and hugged him to his breast.

[Frodo] lay back in Sam’s gentle arms, closing his eyes, like a child at rest when night-fears are driven away by some loved voice or hand. Sam felt that he could sit like that in endless happiness. . . .

For men, loving union is attainable only through shared suffering.

Bravery & Mercy

While *The Hobbit* is more lighthearted than *The Lord of the Rings*, it foreshadows many themes of the more serious work. Bilbo Baggins is firmly planted in his life in the safe, pleasant Shire, but he takes the challenge of adventure and seeks out the dragon and his gold. He encounters challenges that soldiers in the Great War also faced. Bilbo is willing to fight, but he engages in an inner battle that is even more important. Conquering one’s fear is more difficult than external fighting. When Bilbo descends into the dragon’s cave, he hears the dragon.

It was at this point that Bilbo stopped. Going on from there was the bravest thing he ever did. The tremendous things that happened afterwards were as nothing compared to it. He fought the real battle in the tunnel alone, before he ever saw the vast danger that lay in wait.

Bilbo and his companions also have an unpleasant encounter with Orcs, of whom Tolkien says:

It is not unlikely that they invented some of the machines that have since troubled the world, especially the ingenious devices for killing large numbers of people at once, for wheels and engines and explosions always delighted them. . . .

Tolkien had encountered such machines on the Western Front.

Bilbo faces his most important challenge (whose significance is not clarified until the end of *The Lord of the Rings*) when he is separated from his friends in the caverns of the Misty Mountains and accidentally (but are there any accidents?) finds the Ring of Power, which its previous possessor, Gollum, had lost. Bilbo discovers that the Ring makes him invisible, and he uses his invisibility to escape from Gollum – who is trying to get the Ring back – but Gollum blocks the way out of the goblin-infested caverns.

Bilbo almost stopped breathing, and went stiff himself. He was desperate. He must get away, out of this horrible darkness, while he had any strength left. He must fight. He must stab the foul thing, put its eyes out, kill it. It meant to kill him. No, not a fair fight. He was invisible now. Gollum had no sword. Gollum had not actually threatened to kill him, or tried to yet. And he was miserable, alone, lost. A sudden understanding, a pity mixed with horror, welled up in Bilbo’s heart: a glimpse of

endless unmarked days without light or hope of betterment, hard stone, cold fish, sneaking and whispering. All these thoughts passed in a flash of a second. He trembled. And then quite suddenly in another flash, as if lifted by a new strength and resolve, he leaped.

Bilbo's possession of the Ring begins with pity. While his manly bravery was essential, it is this pity that ultimately saves him and others.

Merciful Love

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo becomes the true hero, but his heroism is not one of military valor. He is like a sacrificial priest, and one who must become part of the sacrifice. He crosses the dead lands, which are like the poisoned battlefields of the First World War. He disguises himself and slowly strips himself of all possessions – his sword, even the food that he would need to return. When he has Gollum at his mercy, he does not kill him, remembering Gandalf's words about pity and mercy.

“What a pity Bilbo did not stab the vile creature, when he had a chance!”

“Pity! It was Pity that stayed his hand, and Mercy: not to strike without need.”

“I do not feel any pity for Gollum. . . . He deserves death.”

“Deserves death! I daresay he does. Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give that to them? Then be not too eager to deal out death in the name of justice, fearing for your own safety. Even the wise cannot see all ends.”

Even after Gollum has betrayed and attacked them, Frodo's servant Sam still will not kill him:

His mind was hot with wrath and the memory of evil. It would be just to slay this treacherous, murderous creature, just and many times deserved; and it also seemed the only safe thing to do. But deep in his heart there was something that restrained him: he could not strike this thing lying in the dust, forlorn, ruinous, utterly wretched. He himself, though only for a little while, had borne the Ring, and now dimly he guessed the agony of Gollum's shriveled mind and body, enslaved to that Ring, unable to find peace or relief ever in life again.

At the end, Frodo fails, yet is saved. He does not throw the Ring into the fire; he puts it on and claims it. Gollum wrestles with him and bites off Frodo's ring finger, and then falls into the fire, destroying both himself and the Ring. A power beyond that of the characters rules Middle-earth and brings about salvation despite the inadequacies and failures of the characters. Those who are saved rather than destroyed by this power act out of pity, the love that responds to suffering.

The Wounded Hero

The hero can pity those who suffered, because he, too, has suffered. The hero, like every male who has truly become a man, is wounded. Every man, as Robert Bly pointed out in *Iron John*, bears the scars, often quite literally, that he got in becoming a man. Tolkien and Lewis felt an attraction to Northernness because the Norse gods themselves were wounded and mortal; they, like men, would die in the fight against evil, but they nonetheless fought to the very end. Tyr, like Beren, was one-handed; he lost one hand when he bound Fenris the wolf. Arthur is wounded and can seek healing only in Avalon.

The soldier who saves his country leaves a boy and comes back, as Paul Fussell points out in *The Great War and Modern Memory*, a trained killer, who has seen gore and death, and bears the wounds in his body and mind to the grave. My own father died with the shrapnel he had gotten in the Pacific during World War II.

Frodo is wounded – by the poisoned knife of the Ringwraith, by Shelob, and most of all by bearing the Ring, which in the end overcomes him. He returns to the Shire, but he realizes that he cannot go home again; he has changed too much. He explains:

“I have been too deeply hurt, Sam. I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: some one has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them.”

Self-sacrificial love has a transcendent glory, but it can exist only in a world that has suffering and death.

Song of the Crucified

The love that can be found only through suffering was present in the song that was sung at creation (as recounted in *The Silmarillion*). When spirits sang the song that was to take shape as Middle-earth, their work was marred by the disharmony of the rebel spirits. Ilúvatar then sang a theme “deep and wide and beautiful, but slow and blended with an immeasurable sorrow, from which its beauty chiefly came.”

The rebel spirit Melkor sang a song “loud and vain and endlessly repeated,” which tried “to drown the other music by the violence of its voice, but it seemed its most triumphant notes were taken up by the other and woven into its own solemn pattern.” At last Ilúvatar rose, “and in one chord, deeper than the Abyss, higher than the Firmament, piercing as the light of the eye of Ilúvatar, the music ceased.” Ilúvatar had sung his final Word, and there was nothing more to be added to it.

Tolkien thought that in the fictions created by man one could catch a faint, far-off gleam of the *evangelium*, the Good News. The special characteristic of the fairy story is the *eucaastrophe*, the unexpected deliverance and happy ending. In this unexpected deliverance, greater than anything that could have been hoped for, a hint, a foreshadowing, a taste of the final and complete deliverance is experienced. In the real world, the Incarnation was the eucaastrophe of creation, and the Resurrection the eucaastrophe of the Lord’s life.

Eucaastrophe, both in fiction and in real life, is possible only because *dyscaastrophe* is also possible. Resurrection is possible only in a world of death. The Greek gods are ultimately frivolous, because they are immortal. Men and heroes are serious, because they must face death. The Norse gods and the incarnate true God are ultimately serious, because they, like men, can fail and die. Even in Norse mythology, there is a promise of new heavens and new earth; in the Christian story, only through failure and death can the Kingdom of God be brought about. There is no other way; God has no other message, no other Word than his crucified Son; with this chord the music of creation is fulfilled and ends: *Tetelestai* – “It is finished.”

A Glorious Story

Frodo has been called by some a modern hero, but it would be better to call him a Northern or, even better, a Christian hero. He follows the pattern of the life of the hero: He confronts a danger and death, and nearly dies, to protect the peoples of Middle-earth. He returns, but, scarred and wounded, he has to give up something that others may continue to enjoy it. He can find no consolation in ordinary life and leaves Middle-earth forever.

He is a Christian hero because he shows the glory and inadequacy of heroism and indeed of all human effort. We do our best – and then we fail. Success comes from without, like a lightning bolt. The fire falls upon the sacrifice that

has been prepared, and the preparation is pity, the love that realizes the sadness of all life doomed to death.

Yet even in the failure turned to success, the hero finds true glory. He is part of a story; his life and suffering have meaning. As Sam and Frodo await death after the Ring has been destroyed, Sam wonders whether anyone will ever know of their deeds.

“What a tale we have been in, Mr. Frodo, haven’t we?” he said. “I wish I could hear it told! Do you think they’ll say: ‘Now comes the story of Nine-Fingered Frodo and the Ring of Doom?’”

After their rescue and recovery, at the ceremony to honor them, Sam and Frodo hear the minstrel say, “I will now sing to you of Frodo of the Nine Fingers and the Ring of Doom.”

The vast appeal of *The Lord of the Rings* stems from Tolkien’s ability to tell a story that can convince us that we, too, are part of a story, and a story that is even more wonderful than the one we have read in *The Lord of the Rings*, although it has some of the same qualities. Boys and adolescents find in *The Lord of the Rings* the excitement of adventure and of the challenge of becoming a man. They and other readers find in it the mysteries of friendship lived in the face of death, and of the self-sacrifice that is necessary that others may live.

The Wine of Blessedness

They also find in it something both terrible and comforting: that the One who is telling the story in which we live knows our sufferings and our grief and the sadness of death, that somehow they have been there since before the beginning of the world, but that they are not the last word. Even greater than the bitterness of our failures and our death and our descent into nothingness is the rescue that awaits us, swift, unexpected, bringing joy more poignant than grief, a joy made possible only by the existence of sadness, a good brought about by the evil, but which overcomes evil with the love whose name is pity.

The Lord of the Rings breathes mercy throughout. Tolkien faces the reality of conflict and death, but does not see them as the last word. Courage in battle is great, but even greater and stronger are pity and mercy. The Christian hero strives against evil, and the evil that he must ultimately conquer is within him; and he cannot do that by himself. To strive, knowing that apart from grace, victory is impossible, is the final heroism.

Grace works through mercy, and uses mercy to achieve its ends. Mercy is love as it exists in a world of death. Tolkien seeks to justify the ways of God to man, especially the way that man finds hardest, the gift of death. Without death, man could not achieve the greatest love, that of self-sacrifice, to die for another, as God himself chose to do. God allowed death in the world so that he, too, could die and give his life to and for his creatures.

Beyond this acceptance of the bitterest facts of life is something that can be attained only by tasting them to the full. Sam addresses Gandalf: “I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself. Is everything sad going to come untrue?” No, but beyond sadness is something that can come only after sadness: “Their joy was like swords, and they passed in thought out to regions where pain and delight flow together and tears are the very wine of blessedness.”

The hero descends into death and is wounded forever, but his very wounds are his glory, a testimony to a merciful love that goes through and beyond death. The Lamb is victorious, and his victory is that he now stands forever as one slain.

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New Art Book on the *Seven Last Words of Jesus Christ from the Cross*

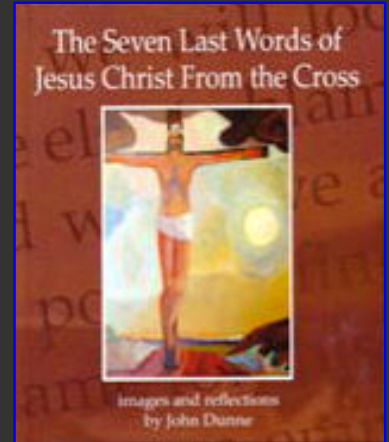
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and theological reflections

by John Dunne

The Seven Last Words is a series of oil paintings on the theme of the seven last words of Jesus Christ from his cross. They were composed over a two year period and attempt to combine the theology of the cross with some of the most important teachings in the life of Christ.

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About the artist

John Dunne is a noted Irish painter. He and his wife are members of Nazareth Community in Dublin, Ireland. Throughout his career as an accomplished artist, John has traveled in many countries. He has absorbed influences from the Far East and the Mediterranean. His interests include theology and its relationship to art. He has a degree in theology. For many years he has worked on different themes which are based in literature. Two examples are childrens' games as played in Dublin during his childhood and the great legends of the Irish hero Cuchulain, interpreted by the Irish poet Thomas Kinsilla.

With all the sacred themes which he paints, John will spend many years researching the material, exploring the theological implications of the particular story and allowing images to come to birth that will point to what lies behind them.

bleeding, waiting for death to end his suffering. Separated as He was from his Father He was obedient to the last and embraced his passion, and in his claiming it as his choice to die He snatched back from his enemies the victory they thought they had won.

The works show the sun moving across the sky as the hours passed and as nature was witness to the drama unfolding, she reacted in violence with earthquakes and darkness hiding the shame of men. Again, separation is at the heart of this series.

Visit John Dunne's [website](http://www.johndunneartist.com): <http://www.johndunneartist.com>



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St. Patrick's Breastplate

also known as *The Deer Cry*

A hymn attributed to St. Patrick of Ireland, 387-460 AD

(translation by Cecil Frances Alexander)

This Celtic hymn, which dates from the late seventh or early eighth century, is traditionally ascribed to St. Patrick. It reflects many of the themes found in Patrick's thought. It is believed that Patrick wrote this hymn as a breastplate of faith for the protection of body and soul against all forms of evil – devils, vice, and the evil which humans perpetrate against one another. Legend has it that the High King of Tara, Loeguire, on Holy Saturday 433 AD, resolved to ambush and kill Patrick and his monks to prevent them from spreading the Christian faith in his kingdom. As Patrick and his followers approached singing this hymn, the king and his men saw only a herd of wild deer and let them pass by. This hymn is both a prayer and statement of faith to be recited for protection, arming oneself for spiritual battle.

I bind unto myself today
the strong name of the Trinity,
by invocation of the same,
the Three in One and One in Three.

I bind this day to me forever,
by power of faith, Christ's incarnation;
his baptism in the Jordan River;
his death on cross for my salvation;
his bursting from the spiced tomb;
his riding up the heavenly way;
his coming at the day of doom:
I bind unto myself today.

I bind unto myself the power
of the great love of cherubim;
the sweet "Well done" in judgment hour;
the service of the seraphim;
confessors' faith, apostles' word,
the patriarchs' prayers, the prophets' scrolls;
all good deeds done unto the Lord,
and purity of virgin souls.

I bind unto myself today
the virtues of the starlit heaven,
the glorious sun's life-giving ray,
the whiteness of the moon at even,
the flashing of the lightning free,
the whirling wind's tempestuous shocks,
the stable earth, the deep salt sea,
around the old eternal rocks.

I bind unto myself today
the power of God to hold and lead,
his eye to watch, his might to stay,
his ear to hearken to my need;
the wisdom of my God to teach,
his hand to guide, his shield to ward;
the word of God to give me speech,
his heavenly host to be my guard.
[Against the demon snares of sin,
the vice that gives temptation force,

the natural lusts that war within,
the hostile men that mar my course;
of few or many, far or nigh,
in every place, and in all hours
against their fierce hostility,

I bind to me these holy powers.
Against all Satan's spells and wiles,
against false words of heresy,
against the knowledge that defiles
against the heart's idolatry,
against the wizard's evil craft,
against the death-wound and the burning
the choking wave and poisoned shaft,
protect me, Christ, till thy returning.]

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win,
Christ to comfort and restore me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

I bind unto myself the name,
the strong name of the Trinity,
by invocation of the same,
the Three in One, and One in Three,
of whom all nature hath creation,
Eternal Father, Spirit, Word.
Praise to the Lord of my salvation:
Salvation is of Christ the Lord.

[The translator, Cecil Frances Humphreys Alexander (1818-1895), was a hymn-writer and poet. She was born in Dublin, Ireland. Her husband, William Alexander, was appointed a Church of Ireland bishop, and later became Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland.

Mrs. Alexander was a keen supporter of the Oxford Movement, and in 1848 published *Hymns For Little Children*, which includes three of the most popular hymns in the English language: "Once in Royal David's City," "All Things Bright and Beautiful" and "There is a Green Hill Far Away."]



That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the Comfort of the Resurrection

a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–89)

CLOUD-PUFFBALL, torn tufts, tossed pillows ' flaunt forth, then chevy on an air-
built thoroughfare: heaven-roysterers, in gay-gangs ' they throng; they glitter in marches.
Down roughcast, down dazzling whitewash, ' wherever an elm arches,
Shivelights and shadowtackle in long ' lashes lace, lance, and pair.
Delightfully the bright wind boisterous ' ropes, wrestles, beats earth bare
Of yestertempest's creases; in pool and rut peel parches
Squandering ooze to squeezed ' dough, crust, dust; stanches, starches
Squadroned masks and manmarks ' treadmire toil there
Footfretted in it. Million-fuelèd, ' nature's bonfire burns on.
But quench her bonniest, dearest ' to her, her clearest-selvèd spark
Man, how fast his firedint, ' his mark on mind, is gone!
Both are in an unfathomable, all is in an enormous dark
Drowned. O pity and indig ' nation! Manshape, that shone
Sheer off, disseveral, a star, ' death blots black out; nor mark
Is any of him at all so stark
But vastness blurs and time ' beats level. Enough! the Resurrection,
A heart's-clarion! Away grief's gasping, ' joyless days, dejection.
Across my foundering deck shone
A beacon, an eternal beam. ' Flesh fade, and mortal trash

Fall to the residuary worm; ' world's wildfire, leave but ash:
In a flash, at a trumpet crash,
I am all at once what Christ is, ' since he was what I am, and
This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, ' patch, matchwood, immortal diamond,
Is immortal diamond.

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